

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 447

EA 030 836

AUTHOR Wall, Milan; Luther, Vicki  
TITLE Better Schools through Public Engagement.  
INSTITUTION Heartland Center for Leadership Development, Lincoln, NE.  
PUB DATE 2000-00-00  
NOTE 81p.  
AVAILABLE FROM Heartland Center for Leadership Development, 941 "O" Street, Suite 920, Lincoln, NE 68508 (\$20.00). Tel: 800-927-1115; Web site: <http://www.4w.com/heartland>; e-mail: [hclld@aol.com](mailto:hclld@aol.com).  
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.  
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; \*Citizen Participation; Community Attitudes; Community Coordination; Community Resources; Educational Change; \*Educational Planning; Educational Principles; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Formative Evaluation; Leaders; \*Management Teams; Outcomes of Education; \*Public Opinion; \*School Community Relationship; Teamwork  
IDENTIFIERS \*School Leadership Teams

## ABSTRACT

It is increasingly clear that even the best schools must engage in systematic and continuous appraisal of their performance, in partnership with the community. A joint planning process could start by engaging citizens in identifying critical issues, relevant assets, and key strategies that can move the community toward a preferred future. Chapter 1, "Building the Leadership Team," describes strategies for increasing community engagement in reform, explains effective methods of recruiting a school-community leadership team, suggests activities for strengthening the school-community connection, and offers 10 strategies for connecting rural schools to promote economic development. Chapter 2, "Visioning the School-Community We Want," explores the important process of writing a vision statement, the usefulness of the statement in motivating public engagement, and the building of a base for the work of the school leadership team. This chapter includes several visioning and scenario-building activities. Chapter 3, "Identifying Issues," highlights the importance of identifying sources of information, discusses the potential for conflict, and suggests activities for talking about data, images of the school, and listing ranked issues. Chapter 4, "Mapping Community and School Assets," considers the use of asset mapping as a planning tool focused on the identification of a local issue involving voluntary associations and formal institutions. This chapter includes activities for mapping the assets of individuals, citizen associations, local institutions, and a community-skills bank. Chapter 5, "Developing Your Action Plan," traces the development of action plans through setting goals, developing strategies, defining activities, and the course of implementation. Chapter 6, "Monitoring Results," reveals the important role of school-community learning teams in monitoring reform outcomes and sustaining public engagement. Suggested activities include a sample work session agenda, questions for self-assessment, and rotating the convenors of meetings. (TEJ)

m. Wall

2A TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to  
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this  
document do not necessarily represent  
official OERI position or policy.

ED 450 447

# Better Schools Through Public Engagement



Heartland Center for Leadership Development

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

---

# **Better Schools through Public Engagement**

**Milan Wall  
Vicki Luther  
Co-Directors**

**Heartland Center for Leadership Development**



**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



© 2000 Heartland Center for Leadership Development  
Telephone: 800 927-1115 or 402 474-7667  
Webpage: [www.4w.com/heartland](http://www.4w.com/heartland)  
E-mail: [hclld@aol.com](mailto:hclld@aol.com)  
941 "O" Street Suite 920  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

---

# Contents

---

## Chapter 1: Building the Leadership Team

|                                                                       |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| The Importance of Community Engagement .....                          | 1  |
| Strategies for Increasing Community Engagement in School Reform ..... | 2  |
| Recruiting the School-Community Leadership Team .....                 | 4  |
| Community Engagement as a Success Strategy .....                      | 7  |
| Suggested Activities for                                              |    |
| Strengthening the School-Community Connection .....                   | 9  |
| Who Am I? A Get-Acquainted Activity .....                             | 10 |
| School Strengths and Weaknesses:                                      |    |
| A Guided Discussion for Listening Trios .....                         | 12 |
| Schools and Economic Development .....                                | 14 |
| 10 Strategies for Making the Connection:                              |    |
| Rural Schools and Economic Development .....                          | 17 |
| Decades Brainstorm .....                                              | 18 |

## Chapter 2: Visioning the School-Community We Want

|                                                                   |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Writing a Vision Statement .....                                  | 19 |
| Usefulness of the Vision Statement in Public                      |    |
| Engagement and School Reform .....                                | 20 |
| Building the Base for the School-Community                        |    |
| Leadership Team's Work .....                                      | 21 |
| Suggested Activities for Creating a Shared Vision Statement ..... | 23 |
| A Five-Step Process for Visioning .....                           | 24 |
| Scenario-Building .....                                           | 26 |
| Sample Agenda for a Work Session .....                            | 27 |
| Directions for a Visioning Activity .....                         | 29 |

## Chapter 3: Identifying Issues

|                                                          |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| The Importance of Identifying Issues .....               | 31 |
| Combining Information Sources .....                      | 32 |
| Potential for Conflict .....                             | 33 |
| Suggested Activities for Identifying Issues .....        | 35 |
| Talking About Data: Guiding A Group Discussion .....     | 37 |
| Images of the School: A Structured Discussion .....      | 39 |
| Listing and Ranking Issues: A Small Group Activity ..... | 41 |

## Chapter 4: Mapping Community and School Assets

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Overview .....                  | 43 |
| Mapping Individual Assets ..... | 44 |
| Voluntary Associations .....    | 45 |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



|                                                                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Formal Institutions .....                                          | 45 |
| Suggested Activities for Mapping Community and School Assets ..... | 47 |
| Mapping Individual Assets .....                                    | 49 |
| Mapping the Assets of Citizen Associations .....                   | 51 |
| Mapping the Assets of Local Institutions .....                     | 52 |
| Creating a Community Skills Bank .....                             | 53 |
| <b>Chapter 5: Developing Your Action Plan</b>                      |    |
| Overview .....                                                     | 55 |
| Setting Goals .....                                                | 55 |
| Developing Strategies .....                                        | 56 |
| Defining a Project or Activity .....                               | 57 |
| Implementation Steps .....                                         | 58 |
| Action Planning Worksheet .....                                    | 60 |
| Suggested Activities for Developing Your Action Plan .....         | 61 |
| Goal-Setting With A Group .....                                    | 63 |
| A Town Hall Meeting Sampler .....                                  | 64 |
| Both Sides of the Trend: A Discussion Guide .....                  | 71 |
| <b>Chapter 6: Monitoring Results</b>                               |    |
| About Learning Teams .....                                         | 75 |
| The Continuous Learning Cycle .....                                | 76 |
| Learning Team Meetings .....                                       | 77 |
| Discussion Questions for Learning Teams .....                      | 78 |
| Learning Teams as Participatory Evaluation .....                   | 79 |
| Suggested Activities for Monitoring Results .....                  | 81 |
| Sample Work Session Agenda .....                                   | 83 |
| Questions for Self-Assessment .....                                | 84 |
| Rotating the Conveners of Meetings .....                           | 85 |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



# Preface

---

Given today's fast-changing world, it is becoming increasingly clear that even the best schools must undertake a systematic and continuous appraisal of their current condition and future directions if they are to remain valuable and viable contributors to their community's quality life. And it's just as clear that schools cannot undertake that appraisal unless it is done in full partnership with the communities in which they are located.

This manual was written to help schools and communities undertake such a joint planning process, with the future of *both* the school and community in mind. Too often, schools and communities either do little planning at all or, if they do, the planning activities are seen as separate and distinct processes. Today, there is a growing recognition that the fate of communities and their schools are linked so tightly that the future of the community is not secure unless the school thrives, and vice versa.

One way to get started on a joint planning process is to engage citizens in thinking about a preferred future for both the school and community, then involve the community in a process of identifying critical issues, relevant assets and key strategies that will move the community toward that preferred future. This manual describes a step-by-step approach to such a process. Schools and communities may follow this process rigorously, or they may adapt it in a way that meshes with current local situations and needs.

## A Recommended Process and Schedule

What follows is a recommended process and schedule which may be adapted to fit local circumstances. The schedule might be collapsed into a few weeks, instead of several months, if school and community leaders feel a strong sense of urgency. Or sections may be reordered or altered to take into account already existing or ongoing planning processes that these steps may complement or support.

|         |                                            |          |
|---------|--------------------------------------------|----------|
| Step 1: | Build the School-Community Leadership Team | August   |
| Step 2: | Vision the School-Community We Prefer      | October  |
| Step 3: | Identify Key Issues                        | December |
| Step 4: | Map School-Community Assets                | January  |
| Step 5: | Develop the Action Plan                    | March    |
| Step 6: | Monitor Results                            | April    |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



The chapters of this manual are written to explain each step in depth, with suggestions for how to proceed and activities that support each step. This manual was not intended as a "how-to" guide to school reform, about which massive amounts of material have been developed in the last decade. Rather the purpose of these materials is to outline a process that can be used to engage the public in deliberation about matters important to the school and community. These matters may include such school improvement issues as strengthening teaching and learning, school and community-relevant matters such as recreation programs, or such other issues as future community support for school programs or facilities.

These materials were developed with support of the New Iowa Schools Development Corporation. Some of the content was supplemented by previous materials developed for the Nebraska Center for Excellence in Education, the United States Forest Service, the Community Partnership Center at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



# Chapter 1: Building the Leadership Team

---

## The Importance of Community Engagement

---

Community involvement in education is not a new idea. At one time in our nation's past, community members built schools with their own hands and housed teachers in their own homes. As schooling became more complex, less direct community involvement became the rule. Today, the technical nature of education often keeps the community at a distance, and even parents may be reluctant to visit schools. Many community members are either unaware of what schools are like or complacent about school quality. According to national polls, public opinion typically assumes that something may be wrong with schools elsewhere, but local schools are probably okay.

Such vague good feelings about local schools are not good enough, however, in a world that is quickly changing in fundamental, structural ways. Because of the increasing complexity of society and economy, it's unlikely that school reform can succeed without broad-based community support. And because so few adults in our communities have children of school age, it's unlikely that community involvement will come easily for either schools or communities. With the increased number of two-income and single-parent families, getting people involved in important local issues of any kind is difficult.

Yet citizens do participate when they know how and when they perceive a real benefit from their involvement. Trust and comfort are integral to expanded community involvement, and they must be earned over time. It's a process of relationship-building that can be facilitated through a systematic approach to identifying new leaders, supporting school and community networks, and eventually building a shared vision of the future of the school and its importance to the community.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Strategies for Increasing Community Engagement in School Reform

---

Here is a series of strategies that schools can use to increase community involvement in local reform processes:

1. **Understanding the Impacts of Change:** Find ways to dramatize how change is impacting schools at the local level. Ask yourself these questions:

*Are the school and community ready to embrace or accept that global social and economic changes have a significant impact on life in even the smallest communities? Or do we pretend that our community can avoid impacts of change?*

Get information to community leaders that describes the impact of, for example, global economic competition on local graduates.

Share information from up-to-date research about school effectiveness. Ask community and business leaders what they think today's graduates must know to be successful in the future.

**Ask community and business leaders  
what they think today's graduates  
must know to be successful.**

---

2. **Assess Local Attitudes about Schools.** Through informal conver-

sations, focus groups at parent meetings, or formal means such as surveys, find out what you can about local attitudes toward fundamental school change in your community.

*What attitudes of people (inside schools and out) do you need to help make necessary changes? Are they open to new ideas and new perspectives? What resistance can we expect? What parts of the community will be most resistant?*

3. **Determine What Knowledge is Missing:** Decide what information your community needs that it doesn't now have. Based on your assessment of local understanding and attitudes toward fundamental school change, ask what additional information you need to put into the community's hands... and how you will need to get it there.

*Do we have the information we need? Or do we need to find additional information? Will some other resource be helpful to us? How will we track down that resource?*

Get both school and community leaders involved in a process of determining what information you need that you don't now have,

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



or that you don't think the school and community have grasped sufficiently. Use electronic data bases, government data banks and other up-to-date sources of information in your search for the "missing pieces."

4. **Make Sure the Necessary Players are Involved:** Decide whether you have the right people involved, or whether you need to convince some other important part of the community that your change-oriented process is worthwhile.

*When we get our local leadership group involved or host a community session, let's ask, "Who's not here?" Among those people who have the most to gain (or lose), who is not represented? Are the right people representing the key constituencies?*

Follow the advice of looking for skills, not names, when you decide who else needs to be recruited to represent the community and the school in the process.

5. **Get People Meaningfully Involved:** The principal stakeholders in local school reform need to be involved for two critical reasons. First, a mix of ideas will lead to better decision making, as the perspective and knowledge of the entire school and community get into the mix. Second, key groups and individuals need to feel ownership for results. They won't unless they are meaningfully involved from the start:

*Do we have a leadership team that represents key stakeholders? Or, alternatively, do we have advisory committees for each major constituent group? How can we tell whether stakeholders feel that they are meaningfully involved?*

6. **Monitor the Process Continuously:** Monitoring progress just once or only periodically isn't enough.

Make sure that you have set up some way to keep track of progress, forecast weak points, and maintain involvement that participants feel is worthwhile.

*Are people attending meetings and work sessions? Do all sessions have time built in for active participation? Are feedback mechanisms built in?*

Most of us need the understanding and support of others when we try to do something new or different. Make sure that you have others involved who can bring along their own new ideas and fresh approaches... who aren't afraid to tell you that you need to alter your own perspective.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Recruiting the School-Community Leadership Team**

A good way to make sure that your community engagement activities stay on track is to recruit a representative group of school and community leaders to serve as a steering committee—*school-community leadership team*—as referred to in these materials. Here's one way to go about recruiting this group:

**Identify Stakeholder Groups.** Identify a list of key stakeholder groups among critical school constituencies. External constituencies might include business and industry, health care, farm groups, senior citizens, parent organizations, local government, financial institutions, houses of worship, news media. Internal constituencies might include teachers, administrators, support staff members, students, board members.

### **Is every population group in the community represented?**

---

**Recruit Representatives.** Now, ask each group to name a representative to join the leadership team. Or recruit the obvious individual opinion leaders that are already

well known. Make sure, however, that you don't overload well-intentioned people who are already over committed.

**Schedule an Initial Meeting.** At an initial meeting for orientation and organization, ask the group to determine what important stakeholders might be left out. Are there groups newer to the community who are not represented? Is the group sufficiently diverse in terms of age, race, ethnic background, economic situation? Get the group going with at least an initial organizational framework—an interim chair or convener, someone to keep notes, perhaps, and, if your team is large, an executive group. Develop a consensus on the purpose of your work together.

**Plan Your Schedule.** At a subsequent meeting, work with your leadership team to develop a schedule of activities for the year and begin a marketing plan to keep the larger community informed.

**Spread the Word.** Schedule briefing sessions with key stakeholder groups on the purpose statement and the timeline. At these sessions, get people involved in the process in an initial way by using a futuring activity, such as *Decades Brainstorm* (pg. 18). Consider using the activity called *Both Sides of the Trend* (pg. 69) as a way to get more people involved directly as you start your process.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Once you get key stakeholders involved, follow a few simple rules to keep them involved:

1. **Keep everyone's self-interests in mind.** People may get involved out of a sense of larger community good, but they'll need to see connections to their own interests to stay meaningfully involved. Help them see those connections.
2. **Make the larger perspective obvious.** Oftentimes, people need help to see how their own, perhaps small or onetime, contribution fits into the larger picture. Motivation is greater when they see how their own ideas fit into the whole.
3. **Define the task.** Don't keep people guessing about what you want them to do. Define the task, from the beginning, in terms everyone can understand. Don't be afraid to admit where you are feeling your way or plowing new ground. Be up front about what you see as the end point, and why community involvement is important to that objective.
4. **Make good use of everyone's time.** Plan meetings carefully, starting and ending on time. Share the agenda and ask for the group's consent to that agenda before you start. Keep activities focused and well-organized.
5. **Share the credit for results.** Make a habit of telling people that you appreciate their involvement. Give others the chance to take the credit for results achieved. Help people find ways to celebrate their successes, informally as well as formally.
6. **If you get in trouble, ask for help.** If the process goes awry or gets bogged down, don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask those involved to help analyze what to do next. Or get someone in from the outside. Don't focus on blame. Get things fixed and move on.
7. **Retain flexibility.** This may be a new process for many of us. Getting the community involved makes it even more complicated. Retain enough flexibility to change when changes are needed.

In every community, there is a pool of persons who are repeatedly asked to serve on advisory boards or special committees. They are the natural helpers in the system who somehow understand how to get involved, how to find resources, and how to ask for help from others. But relying on that pool alone, however well-intentioned, can also prove difficult, as an elementary school in Maryland learned.

With the aid of a team of 10 representatives selected from the broad school-community, this elementary school initiated site-based management. Its functions were three: assess the social climate of the school, assess the academic climate of the school, and develop an annual school improvement plan including objectives, activities, timetable and evaluation elements.

### Better Schools through Public Engagement



In an attempt to encourage more parental interest and involvement, the elementary school initiated, designed, wrote and distributed a 45-page handbook to parents, conveying information the school thought was important. Parents, however, felt intimidated by the handbook. They described it as being authoritarian, too long, and not containing the kinds of things parents felt were important.

Two-way communication was then initiated, aided by the school-community team. As a result, the handbook has since been redesigned as a two-pocket folder. It is easy to read and allows internal storage of report cards and other important papers. Most importantly, it provides information the parents thought important.

Another example comes from a Nebraska high school, which set about to modify and add to its technology program. Several new computer labs were placed in operation and new courses such as *Principles of Technology* and *Chemistry in the Community* were added to the curriculum.

### **The business community received a firsthand look at the talent of the school—its students.**

---

On each of these occasions, printed invitations were sent to the 52 primary businesses in the community. (Primary businesses were

identified by the Chamber of Commerce as those with sizable payrolls and a high level of continuous employment.)

When representatives from the businesses arrived to observe the new programs, they were greeted by students and school officials. Students led the explanation and discussion sessions. A reception for the business representatives concluded the activities. At the reception, one of the high school string quartets provided music.

The results were powerful. The business community received a firsthand look at the talent of the school—its students. Business people were introduced to new curriculum ideas and processes, their questions about the application of the knowledge were answered by students and staff, and they had the opportunity to walk through the hallways and be greeted by the general population.

Many of the business leaders who attended later served on school improvement teams at the elementary and secondary level, worked for and with the school foundation on school-related projects, and participated in programs to recognize student achievement.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Community Engagement as a Success Strategy**

Clearly, leadership is a continuing issue for the school district and the community. Recruiting new people into leadership positions and supporting the initial efforts of emerging leaders is one of the most productive strategies for school success.

Community members who are given continuous and varied opportunities to help with educational decision making are much more likely to favor the school at all levels. Above all, the school district that works hardest to make citizen participation possible at all levels is in the best position to thrive in these challenging times.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Suggested Activities for Strengthening the School-Community Connection**

---

Community involvement activities may range from one-on-one recruiting of a volunteer to speaking at special events that gather the community together to talk about the school of the future. The following activities may be adapted to a variety of settings, but in general these activities may be used to develop a shared understanding and a team attitude among groups of volunteers.

The activities that are included are:

- ♦ **Who Am I? A Get-Acquainted Activity**
- ♦ **School Strengths and Weaknesses: A Guided Discussion for Listening Trios**
- ♦ **Schools and Economic Development Exercise**
- ♦ **Decades of Change**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Who Am I? A Get-Acquainted Activity**

**Purpose:** Allow each participant to introduce herself/himself to the group and to understand the varied resources and expectations within the group. The activity works very well with mixed lay and professional groups and as a beginning point for any working session.

**Suggested Group Size:** For groups of 30 or less, the activity can be managed with one-on-one contact. For larger groups, the activity can be managed by displaying each participant's completed paper so that all can be read immediately or in the course of the work session.

**Time Required:** The activity takes from 15 to 30 minutes depending on group size. Sufficient time is needed for each participant to complete a worksheet and then read others.

**Materials:** Paper, pencil and worksheets for each participant. Masking tape if display space will be used.

### **Directions:**

1. The facilitator provides each participant with a sheet of paper which has been divided into four quadrants. Each with one of these headings:

**Who  
I Am**

**What  
I Do**

**What I Bring  
to this Group**

**What I Expect  
from this Meeting**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



2. The facilitator asks that each individual work alone to fill in each quadrant.
3. After three to five minutes, the facilitator asks participants to share something from their lists. If the group is small, participants can walk around the room and exchange worksheets until everyone has seen every worksheet. Larger groups may tape the worksheets to a wall as a display and then take the time to read them immediately or at various points in the meeting. Facilitators may also ask individuals to offer examples from their list before the display is created.
4. The facilitator offers a summary from the following points:
  - ♦ A crucial element of planning for the future is an understanding of the makeup of the school-community, and the building of a pool of attitudes, skills, knowledge and abilities available.
  - ♦ During this activity, the group demonstrated that every school-community is composed of diverse points of view. All are legitimate.
  - ♦ Together, like pieces of a puzzle, these resources comprise the tools available to achieve the school-community's vision of a preferred future.

This activity not only helps participants understand the diversity of their own school-community, it provides the leadership team with a perspective of the expectations and available resources upon which it can draw.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **School Strengths and Weaknesses: A Guided Discussion for Listening Trios**

---

**Purpose:** Provide a guide for discussion about the future of the school in an atmosphere that allows for maximum participation.

**Suggested Group Size:** The activity can be used with unlimited numbers of trios, provided that the room is large enough to allow for adequate separation to control for noise interference.

**Time Required:** This activity takes about 45 minutes.

**Materials Required:** A copy of *Questions for Discussion* for each participant. The list may be posted if the group is small enough to permit each trio member to see it.

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What is the greatest strength of our school district? What is the greatest weakness?
2. What was the best part of your school experience? Do you think that today's students have the same experience?
3. What is the greatest difference between schools today and when you were a student?
4. What threats do you think the future poses for our school district? What opportunities does the future offer to our school district?

### **Directions:**

1. The facilitator briefly explains the goals of the activity, to guide discussion about the school and the future in a way that maximizes participation.
2. Participants are asked to form trios. Within each trio, participants identify themselves as **A**, **B** or **C**.
3. Copies of the *Questions for Discussion* are distributed by the facilitator, who gives the following instructions:

#### ***Round 1***

- In each trio, Participant **A** is the first speaker, and chooses the question to be discussed from those listed.
- Participant **B** is the first listener.
- Participant **C** is the first observer.
- The question chosen is to be discussed by the speaker. To gain understanding, the listener may ask for examples, repeat or paraphrase what was heard, or reflect the feelings being expressed by the speaker.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



- ♦ The listener must then summarize, in her/his own words and without notes, what was heard.
  - ♦ If the summary is thought to be incorrect or missing some points, both the speaker and the observer are free to interrupt and correct any misunderstanding.
  - ♦ The observer is to make certain that the listener does not omit, distort, add to, or interpret what the speaker has said.
4. The facilitator begins Round 1. After about seven to ten minutes, the group leader stops the process and responds to procedural questions. The facilitator should use this time to make sure that everyone understands the three roles of speaker, listener and observer so that the remaining rounds may continue.
  5. The facilitator announces the beginning of Round 2. The Round 1 process is repeated, with participant **B** becoming the speaker, participant **C** the listener, and participant **A** the observer. The new speaker chooses his or her question and begins. Again, about seven to ten minutes are allowed for Round 2, with the facilitator calling time.
  6. The facilitator announces Round 3 and the switching of roles again. In this round, participant **C** becomes the speaker, **A** the listener, and **B** the observer. After seven to ten minutes, discussion is ended.
  7. The facilitator conducts a brief summary of the activity by asking for volunteers to offer examples of answers they heard to the various *Questions for Discussion*. The activity concludes with the facilitator reminding the group that the purpose was to hold a discussion with a structure that created maximum participation, as they share answers to the questions.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Schools and Economic Development**

---

**Purpose:** Identify ways in which the school can contribute to the economic vitality of the larger community of which it is a part, then explore ways in which the larger community can directly contribute to the mission of the school.

**Suggested Group Size:** The activity can be managed with very large groups if smaller groups of seven to ten are seated at tables together.

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

**Materials Required:** Flip charts and marking pens are needed for small group activity. Masking tape is needed to display small group work. *10 Strategies for Making the Connection: Rural Schools and Economic Development* (pg. 17) may be used as a handout.

**Directions:**

1. Group leader should have a copy of the *10 Strategies for Making the Connection: Rural Schools and Economic Development* for reference.
2. If available, a School District Vision Statement should be posted prominently in the room, and/or distributed to participants as they arrive for the meeting.
3. The facilitator directs each table group to identify ways in which the school district and its personnel could, or already do, assist the larger community in economic development activities. Each small group is asked to brainstorm a list of ideas and write them on newsprint. They are encouraged to consider how all types of school personnel, including students, can or do contribute.
4. After about 15 minutes, the facilitator asks each group to report two ideas from its list. After each group has reported, other ideas are solicited from the full group. (For additional ideas, the group leader refers to *10 Strategies for Making the Connection: Rural Schools and Economic Development*.) Lists may be displayed.
5. The facilitator then asks the small groups to brainstorm a list of ways in which the community can assist the school district in fulfilling its vision. Again, each small group is asked to brainstorm a list of ideas and write them on newsprint.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



6. After about 15 minutes, the group leader asks each group to report two ideas from their list. Again, ideas are solicited from the full group after each small group has contributed to the list. Lists may be displayed.
7. In summarizing this activity, the facilitator notes that these idea lists will be important resources to the school-community's planning for the future. The lists may also be the source of ideas for special projects or task forces.

**Identify ways in which the school and community benefit one another.**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **10 Strategies for Making the Connection: *Rural Schools and Economic Development***

1. **Chamber-School Committee Membership.** Appoint educators to Chamber of Commerce committees; appoint business people to school committees. Ask participants occasionally to report to their respective boards on what they are doing.
2. **Joint School Board-Chamber Meetings.** Schedule regularly a joint meeting of the School Board and the Chamber of Commerce to share information relevant to economic development.
3. **Economic Surveys by School Classes.** Ask high school classes or clubs to conduct community surveys to help determine current economic activities, trends, and projections.
4. **Career Awareness Days.** Ask local employers to act as "mentors for a day" for high school students as a means of career exploration.
5. **Teacher-Business Exchanges.** Sponsor a one-day "job exchange" program, asking teachers to work in businesses and business people to work in schools. Hold a follow-up discussion.
6. **Entrepreneurship Education.** Sponsor a class in the high school on starting and operating a small business, with guest speakers from local businesses as an integral part of the instructional plan.
7. **School Facilities as Incubators.** Make available under-utilized school facilities as small business incubators. Hire students to provide support services.
8. **School-Based Businesses.** Initiate a program that will help students explore, start and operate businesses filling gaps in available local services.
9. **Joint Economic Development Planning.** Ask the School Board, County Board, Town Council and Chamber of Commerce to develop a joint area economic development action plan, using the unique strengths and contributions of each partner.
10. **Public-Private Partnership for Leadership Development.** Develop a public-private partnership for leadership development, focusing the program on developing local capacity and nurturing local resources that are critical to economic renewal.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Decades Brainstorm

---

- Goals:**
1. To help participants discuss the images of the past, present and future that influence their thinking.
  2. To increase participation within the group.
- Group Size:** No more than 30
- Time Required:** 15 to 30 minutes
- Materials:** Easel and newsprint and several markers or chalkboards and chalk.

### Directions

On paper or chalkboard, group leader lists decades: 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990. Judging the beginning dates by the age of the group, the leader asks participants to "brainstorm" what they remember about those years. Suggestions such as news events, songs, styles and weather can be offered. Participants follow brainstorming rules whereby all comments are recorded and not discussed or criticized. The leader must also judge the amount of time to be spent on each decade list and move the group through the past to the present and then ask the group members to predict what will be memorable about the future.

### Comments

Because it dramatizes personal reactions and memories of changes, this activity is an excellent beginning for any group that wants to deal with the issues of change and the future. This activity may be used at the beginning of a meeting or work session to set the stage for a serious discussion or as an ice breaker that helps a group to relax and enjoy working together. It is used most effectively when the leader plans some time for comments that can serve as a transition to a longer consideration of the impacts of change.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Chapter 2: Visioning the School-Community We Want

---

### Writing a Vision Statement

---

When school and community leaders create a mental image—a dream—of the ideal school of the 21st century, they are envisioning a **preferred future**. They are envisioning the best possible future, given the best possible intervention by today's leaders. Sometimes school and community groups confuse the terms vision and mission. In order to clarify, here are definitions of both terms.

**Vision:** a shared image of the preferred future of the school and community that guides long-term development towards that future.

**Mission:** a statement of operational focus that guides day-to-day operations of the school or organization.

Some examples of Vision Statements are useful in drawing this distinction and in serving as models.

*In our school and community, citizens own the school and act as if they do. Nearly everyone votes. School board meetings are sometimes heated, but the discussions are about curriculum. And how to maintain the conditions that teaching and learning demand. The business community works closely with the school, providing support and opportunities for work-study, employment and retraining. The school looks like a community institution—and it is, but its reach is vast. It is connected to the much wider community of all educated people through the electronic exchange of data, video and other material. All students tap libraries from around the nation, and, increasingly, the world.*

—Vermont Vision of Education Reform

*In the preferred future, our community will serve as the connecting, sheltering support for our schools. Business and social services along with law enforcement and churches will be actively involved in the lives of students and families through school-community programs. Regular Town Hall meetings will engage citizens and students together to identify community assets and opportunities. Through all types of school and community activities, the generations will connect and welcome one another.*

—Excerpted from materials developed by the  
Heartland Center for Leadership Development

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Here is an example of a mission statement:

*We expect to manage all resources available to us efficiently and effectively in order to provide a maximum benefit to the students that the community entrusts to our care day to day.*

Or, here's an example of a mission statement focused on public engagement:

*Our school-community relations will be marked by a continuous process of authentic public engagement to consider the best ways to serve the community and its youth and to build a lasting and productive relationship between the school and its various constituencies.*

Both of these mission statements were developed from work of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development in various school improvement projects dating to the early 1990s.

### **Usefulness of the Vision Statement in Public Engagement and School Reform**

---

A vision of the school and the community in the future should be a major element in public engagement for school reform. When developed and reviewed in a way that promotes consensus, a vision statement establishes the framework for school reform decisions and for judging progress over time.

Building a shared school-community vision means first imagining the preferred (not just possible or probable) future, then planning the actions necessary to achieve that vision. That process, ultimately, is the challenge of turning dreams into actions.

Vision statements are built on information about the needs of the school and the community, an understanding of trends that will influence the future and, most importantly, the realistic hopes of the participants in the process. Creating a vision of the future also requires time and space for reflection on what key principles, values and beliefs will undergird the efforts to rethink the teaching and learning paradigm and the definition of community itself.

Because schools depend increasingly on the support of taxpayers who have no school-age children, it has become more and more important for school leaders to include the community in planning for the future. In fact, the creation of a shared vision statement and the review of that statement community-wide are excellent ways to build the relationships that protect and nurture the school through all types of economic and social change. Certainly community residents who only

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



hear about the school during campaigns to pass bond issues have a different and more limited perspective than the citizens who have had many opportunities to be engaged in school planning and programming.

Furthermore, many parents and other community members are relatively complacent about their own local schools. Even in a time when headlines breed mistrust about public education, opinion polls show that many citizens typically do not perceive a need for significant change in their own local schools. Through a step-by-step process to create a shared vision of the future, community members can learn more about the school, why it must change, and how to continue to participate in rethinking what schools and communities must do together.

### **Building the Base for the School-Community Leadership Team's Work**

---

Creating a shared vision statement can offer a beginning step for the school-community leadership team's work. Success in creating and then achieving the vision of the future is directly related to the numbers of people who have been involved in it. The team can use a variety of techniques to create a shared vision statement and then develop opportunities for a wide variety of community review and comments.

While every leadership team will have to adapt guidelines to fit local circumstances, here are a few general principles about vision statements and community review.

- Small groups or subcommittees can do the actual writing of a short vision statement if a larger group can contribute ideas, phrases, and key themes.
- Community review can take the form of posting the vision statement in stores, on community bulletin boards, in newspapers, cable television announcement scrolls, and other forms. It's the exposure that's important.  
Any simple process can be used to collect comments. A version of the suggestion box or a space for return comments on a coupon-size copy of the vision statement can work.
- It's acceptable if no changes are suggested. After all, the vision statement is based on values, hopes and aspirations for a preferred future; it's likely to encounter acceptance, but the review is still important.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Suggested Activities for Creating a Shared Vision Statement**

---

Several techniques may be used to create school-community vision statements. Three techniques are presented here.

- ♦ **A Five-Step Process for Visioning**
- ♦ **Scenario-Building**
- ♦ **Directions for a Visioning Activity**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **A Five-Step Process for Visioning**

---

This five-step process represents a series of activities that will organize the creation of a vision statement for a school or school district. This process originated in a K-12 school district with 500 students.

**Step 1: Decide on the membership of a steering committee.**

The duties of the steering committee include the review and analysis of proposed vision statements and the writing and editing of a draft vision statement for public review.

**Step 2: Publicize the opportunity for submitting a vision statement.**

Students, teachers, school staff members, parents and community members are invited to submit a one-page statement of what the ideal school would be like. The vision statement should answer these questions:

1. How should we teach and learn in our ideal school?
2. What kind of organization should our ideal school be?
3. What will our graduates know and be when they leave our ideal school?
4. How will our ideal school interact with the community?

Some vision statements may be solicited. For example, a creative writing class might be asked to contribute. Or leaders among the teaching faculty and staff might also be invited to submit a draft. A parent group or service club might be asked.

**Step 3: Each member of the steering committee also submits a draft vision statement reflecting her/his own ideas.**

When all submissions have been collected, the steering committee first reads each and then divides the total among the committee members for analysis.

In order to analyze the vision statements, steering committee members are asked to read each statement and record the most frequently occurring ideas, themes or words and bring that listing to a work session.

**Step 4: At the work session, each steering committee member's list is displayed on newsprint and the group works to identify similarities.**

A new list of shared ideas, themes and words is created. Using this list as a touchstone, the group outlines and then

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



together writes a statement of vision incorporating the shared ideas, themes and words.

**Step 5: The draft vision statement should be reviewed by the school and community in some way.**

A "Town Hall Meeting" on the vision for the school is one way to build support and communication with the community at large. Perhaps reading the vision statement can be part of the agenda at a school board meeting, student organization meeting or parent group meetings. Comments may be collected informally or formally (through a public hearing).

The steering committee should meet for one last work session following the public review in order to consider comments received and edit or make any revisions. Whatever the revisions, a final formal adoption at a school board meeting is suggested.

***Advantages/Disadvantages***

This five-step process requires an active, well-organized facilitator to support the steering committee. If possible, such a facilitator might be more effective if she/he were an "outsider," rather than an employee of the district, although the process can be managed by a staff member or teacher.

The entire process might take two to three months. A short time frame can keep the process interesting and vital by compressing time between work sessions and public meetings, to keep interest in the process high.

The composition of the steering committee is vital, as so much responsibility and control rests with this group. Membership on the steering committee should be carefully considered to cover political dimensions and to deal with issues of credibility and follow-through.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Scenario-Building

---

A second technique for creating a vision statement with a group of people is scenario-building. A scenario is an outline or script for the future.

Ideas for writing scenarios may be generated through small group discussions. Trends (such as the increased use of computers, site-based management, long-distance learning via satellite, or parents as teachers) may be used as parameters.

- Step 1:** Ask the group to develop a scenario of the *probable future* that will occur in 10 or 15 years if the community does nothing differently. This scenario gives some thought to the impact of trends, and then extends the present: The gradual decline of population, for instance, if the school were not equipped to support the community's efforts to attract or retain young families, might result in a scenario of a much smaller school and a declining community.
- Step 2:** Next, the group is asked to develop a scenario which describes a different or a *possible school-community future* if a strategic outlook process gets the school-community organized and actions are taken. This scenario might describe creation of a school-community project to increase day-care and distance learning opportunities, thereby attracting young families, resulting in a substantially different population.
- Step 3:** Reviewing the contrasts in characteristics of the probable and possible futures available for the school-community, the group is asked to identify which aspects of these two descriptions are preferred. As these **preferred futures** are listed, the group leader should remind the participants that the idea of *preferred futures* is an important component of a strategic planning or school improvement process which first defines the future we want and then allows us to analyze what is needed to make that future come true.

### Better Schools through Public Engagement



#### *Advantages/Disadvantages*

The scenario technique requires lots of time and creativity. As a first step for creating a school vision statement, it can be used successfully with memberships of service clubs or with high school classes.

## ***Sample Agenda for a Work Session***

---

The leaders of a work session on writing scenarios might use the following agenda (which may be adapted to special needs of each community):

**7:00 p.m. Registration and Coffee**

- ♦ Participants get name tag, agenda and evaluation sheet

**7:30 p.m. Share agenda**

- ♦ Purpose of the meeting
- ♦ Introduce activity facilitator

**7:40 p.m. Share Project Information**

- ♦ Explain why a vision statement is important
- ♦ Discuss importance of future to school-community
- ♦ Emphasize value of discussion and citizen participation

**7:45 p.m. Visioning Activity**

- ♦ Divide the group in half
- ♦ To one subgroup, assign the task of describing the future of the school district community if nothing different is done
- ♦ To the other subgroup, assign the task of describing the future if a systematic improvement process occurs
- ♦ Explain that they have 30 minutes to work on their scenario descriptions and to record their work on newsprint as a series of phrases or in narrative form

**8:20 p.m. Reports**

- ♦ Ask each subgroup to report on its work
- ♦ Help the group decide how to refine the two scenarios
- ♦ Ask for ideas about how to involve others in discussion of the two scenarios

**9:00 p.m. Closing and Evaluation**

- ♦ Explain the need for another work session to build on these scenarios, then create a school district vision statement
- ♦ Participants fill out evaluation sheets: *What did you like about tonight's meeting? What would you have changed about this meeting?*

**9:15 p.m. Steering Committee** meets to read evaluation forms and discuss next steps.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### ***Follow-up Activities***

The leaders' task, once these scenarios are developed, is to publicize them so that many community members are involved in hearing or reading these alternate views of the future. In such a process, it's better to avoid "disaster" scenarios. In the long run, scenarios that extend a negative trend to a dire extreme are neither productive nor helpful. They don't motivate people as well as positive scenarios do.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Directions for a Visioning Activity

---

Here's a simple process for creating a school-community vision statement using small work groups and basic brainstorming techniques.

1. Worksheets with the following two questions are distributed to each participant.
  - ♦ *What must our schools be like to make sure that our community is thriving 25 years from now?*
  - ♦ *What must our community do to make sure that our children live happy and productive lives?*

To help focus attention, the questions may also be printed on an overhead projector or on a flip chart. The facilitator asks each participant to consider the questions when thinking about a preferred future for their school and community. The word preferred is stressed so that participants imagine the ideal future, not necessarily the probably or possible future.

2. Each participant writes down two or three words or phrases that express the preferred future. Examples might be: progressive, stable, prosperous, caring, environmentally sensitive, full of young families or lots of jobs.
3. After a few moments of reflection and individual writing, the facilitator leads the group in listing their ideas. In turn, each participant offers an idea from her/his list. The listing continues until all ideas are recorded.
4. At this point, the facilitator can lead a brief discussion about the list, asking for clarification if needed.
5. Either as a group or by means of a smaller subcommittee (no fewer than three) the group then uses the list as a basis for writing a vision statement. If a smaller subcommittee does the writing, the draft should be reviewed by the whole group and revised if necessary.
6. The draft vision statement is then ready for community-wide review. The group should devise a means for recording reactions so that if a pattern emerges, revisions can be made. For example, if the draft vision statement is presented to several service clubs and many comments are received noting the omission, such as the mention of attracting retirees, an addition may be made to the Vision Statement.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Chapter 3: Identifying Issues

---

### **The Importance of Identifying Issues**

---

There are several reasons why identifying issues is so important.

First, identifying issues helps to focus the effort of those parts of the school and community that are most important and most likely to be involved. School leaders are faced with an endless series of problems and issues to be resolved. One way to develop a perspective on the future is to examine issues and decide which to address and in what priority.

Second, the actual process of identifying issues can build a shared understanding of the current conditions which must be considered when planning for the future. That shared understanding is the most necessary element to building a vision for the future.

Third, identifying issues can provide a very helpful tool in managing conflict. If school critics have an opportunity to help identify issues, their involvement becomes a means to channel negative activities into a more positive framework.

Fourth, focusing on key issues provides a perspective for the search for community assets that might be applied to these issues.

### ***Sources of Existing Information: Local and State***

Issue identification should not depend solely on school and community leaders' opinions and perceptions. Information about trends external to the community are important, as is information about school effectiveness.

It makes sense to explore existing sources of data collection and analysis as part of issue identification.

Some local sources of information include:

- ♦ City/County Government
- ♦ Hospitals/Nursing Homes
- ♦ Chamber of Commerce
- ♦ Senior Centers
- ♦ Economic or Industrial Development Corporation
- ♦ Main Street Programs
- ♦ Retail Association
- ♦ News Media
- ♦ Major Employers
- ♦ Internet

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Some areas are also served by multi-county organizations such as Educational Service Units, Community Colleges or Regional Councils that may provide useful information.

At the state level, other sources of information may be tapped for information about the county or multi-county area. State level sources include:

- ♦ **State Agencies (such as the Departments of Education, Labor and Economic Development)**
- ♦ **Library Commission**
- ♦ **University Departments**
- ♦ **Special Service Centers within Departments (such as the Bureau of Business Research or the Center for Public Policy Research)**
- ♦ **Cooperative Extension Service**
- ♦ **State Legislative Offices**
- ♦ **State Offices of Congressional Delegations**

State and national associations also offer access to research on issues and important trends.

### ***Combining Information Sources***

An important aspect of issue identification involves the combination of information sources. The strongest approach for recognizing issues, and the approach that allows for the most confidence in the outcome is one that combines quantitative with qualitative information.

For example, using the results of a population study based on the latest census data may lead a school leader to make certain assumptions about labor market needs and growth or decline that would indicate that job preparation is absolutely the top issue for the school in the future. However, when that quantitative information is combined with qualitative information such as the results of student focus group discussions or small group sessions at a town hall meeting, it may be that education about healthy lifestyle is considered to be as or more important by the community.

It's crucial to the success of a local school reform effort to combine judgment, intuition and a perspective of local history with the vast array of quantitative data available. While it's possible to be overwhelmed by the amount of information at our disposal, it's more important than ever to realize that the future cannot be simply a projection of the past. Issues that have been significant for many years might not necessarily be the most critical for the future.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### *Potential for Conflict*

Some school leaders may be reluctant to engage in any issue identification activity because of the potential conflict. Conflict is a natural and expected part of the operation of any public institution and schools are no exception. The pluralistic and diverse nature of American communities makes conflict over public resources inevitable. However, it may be that the school districts that can manage conflict are the schools that will thrive in the future.

Rather than viewing issue identification as a source of conflict, it should be seen as a mainstay for conflict management. Through broad-based community involvement and the development of shared perspectives,

issue identification can serve as a channel for making criticism useful in a school-community engagement effort.

**Consensus, then, is not unanimity but rather a judgment arrived at by most of the group, which all group members are willing to support.**

---

Many issue identification processes deal with building consensus. Consensus is often referred to as a result of a group activity such as setting a priority.

Consensus means a general agreement or group solidarity around an idea. Consensus, practically speaking, means that all group members can accept a decision but not necessarily that the decision reflects everyone's first choice. Consensus, then, is not unanimity but rather a judgment arrived at by most of the group, which all group members are willing to support.

School and community representatives who have thoroughly discussed information about the school's future can then develop a list of issues together. If they also set priorities, a powerful base for a local school improvement effort has been created.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Suggested Activities for Identifying Issues**

---

These activities reflect three main themes in identifying issues. First, the discussion of existing information, second the identification of issues and, third, the ranking of issues in order to set priorities.

The activities include:

- ♦ **Talking About Data: Guiding Group Discussion**
- ♦ **Images of the School: A Structured Discussion**
- ♦ **Listing and Ranking Issues: A Small Group Activity**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Talking About Data: Guiding A Group Discussion**

---

**Purpose:** This activity is used to help groups discuss data in the form of reports or survey results.

**Suggested Group Size:** Any number of small groups, each no larger than seven, is manageable for this activity.

**Time Required:** Depending on the type of data to be discussed, 15 to 30 minutes should be allowed for participants to review the materials (report, survey results, and other data). At least 45 minutes is needed for the discussion session. The larger the total number in the groups, the longer the report time from all groups. With a group of 30, the total time needed for review, discussion and report back is about two hours.

**Materials Required:** Copies of the data (report, survey results, tables) to be discussed. Ideally, each participant has her/his own copy. Executive summaries may also be used.

### **Directions:**

1. The facilitator introduces the activity by briefly describing the source and background of the data. A brief question-and-answer period may be necessary to make sure that there are no unresolved questions about the source of information.
2. The facilitator distributes the copies of the data and asks participants to review and "skim" the materials.
3. Small groups of three to eight are organized around tables. The facilitator instructs each group to name a recorder/reporter and then asks the group to work together to answer the following questions.
  - a. Referring to your copies of the data, what is an example of **information that surprised you?**
  - b. Referring to your copies of the data, what is an example of **information that validated something you already knew?**
  - c. Referring to your copies of the data, what is an example of **information that needs more explanation?**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



The facilitator instructs the groups to take about 15 minutes on each question. The groups may provide more than one example for each question. The recorder/reporter should be prepared to share the small group's work with the large group.

During the discussion time, the facilitator should check in with each small group to observe their progress and answer questions. Groups should also be told when to move to the next question with about 15 minutes allowed for each.

After the discussion time is completed, the facilitator leads the report-back session by asking each small group in turn for one answer for the first question. This continues until all groups have reported all examples or the facilitator judges that sufficient time has been spent on the first question. The process is repeated for the additional questions.

The facilitator concludes the activity with a summary statement about the data and the group's response. Next steps might include planning to provide additional explanation or clarification of some of the data, as the responses indicate.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Images of the School: A Structured Discussion**

---

**Purpose:** This activity is designed to initiate discussion about the positive and negative images of the school. The participants will have the opportunity to analyze the relationship of these images to issues critical to the local process. The activity will produce both positive and negative images and a list of issues. (The same activity could be used to focus on the image of the community.)

**Suggested Group Size:** Any number of small groups (each with three to eight people) clustered at tables.

**Time Required:** About 45 minutes is required for the activity when working with a group of 30. If the total group is larger or many small groups are formed, reporting back to the large group may take additional time.

**Materials Required:** Paper and pencil are required for each participant. Overhead projector and pens or flip chart for the facilitator.

### **Directions:**

1. The facilitator briefly introduces the activity by discussing the importance of image. Reminding the group that image isn't always built on reality, the facilitator may ask for examples of their state's image to "outsiders." For example, many people think of all New Yorkers as being "unfriendly" or all Iowans as farmers.
2. The facilitator asks each small group to imagine that they are working as a team of writers for a late-night talk show. Their task is to develop jokes about schools. They may want to consider what would people ridicule about our schools? For example, "Our schools are so small that..." Each participant works alone first and then shares with the small group.
3. After 10 to 15 minutes, each small group is asked for an example of one of their jokes. The facilitator receives each report, listing on newsprint or overhead the negative concept in the joke.
4. Small groups are then instructed to imagine that they are working on a brochure for recruiting businesses and families to their town. Their task is to list positive images of the school, in the form of phrases or slogans that might be used. A recorder/reporter is needed in each group.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



5. After 10 to 15 minutes, the facilitator again asks each group in turn for one example and continues to list on overhead or newsprint the positive concepts in the images.
6. The two lists are then compared and the group is asked to consider what issues form the basis for the two lists. The facilitator may list issues or discussion points on the overhead or newsprint.
7. The facilitator concludes the activity by reminding the group that images are developed and can be influenced by planning activities such as the one we are engaged in now.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Listing and Ranking Issues: A Small Group Activity**

---

**Purpose:** This activity may be used to generate a list of critical issues. In addition, the structure allows a group to rank those issues in importance. The activity also builds consensus on issue identification and importance.

**Suggested Group Size:** An unlimited number of small groups, provided that sufficient wall space for easel sheet display is available.

**Time Required:** About one hour is needed to complete the activity. More time may be needed for a very large group such as a town hall meeting.

**Materials Required:** Paper and pencils for each participant. Flip charts, markers and tape for each small group.

### **Directions:**

1. The facilitator introduces the activity by briefly describing the importance of identifying issues (no more than 10 minutes). The following points might be used.
  - Leaders are faced with an excess of issues and have to narrow the focus in order to get to action
  - Issues surface through discussion and analysis
  - Opinions and judgments are important in the identification of issues
2. Each participant is asked to write down the three most important issues facing local schools in the future. About five minutes are allowed for individual work.
3. After each individual completes that task, the facilitator directs the small groups to share and develop a group list of three to five issues agreed upon by the group as critical for the future. About 30 minutes are allowed for this work.
4. The facilitator stops the small group work and asks for reports. Each small group, in turn, offers one issue, and the facilitator writes these on an easel sheet allowing space between each issue. The reporting and listing continues until all groups have all issues listed. No duplicate issues are listed. Each sheet is displayed at eye level in an area that is accessible to all participants.
5. The facilitator distributes five self-stick dots to each participant and directs the individuals to go to the newsprint list of issues

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



and "vote" with their dots. Participants may place all 10 dots on one issue or distribute as they wish.

6. During a break, the facilitator counts the dots and, when the group reconvenes, reports back to the group the ranking that has resulted. An overhead or flip chart list of the top five issues may be used by the facilitator.
7. The facilitator concludes the activity by complimenting the group on the discussion that went into identifying and ranking the issues. If next steps are known, the facilitator should describe what will happen next. For example, the participants may be asked to volunteer for a study group or task force on each of the top three or five issues.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Chapter 4: Mapping Community and School Assets

---

### Overview

---

After the school-community leadership team has created a shared vision statement and involved the public in the identification of issues, it's time to consider the assets of the school and the community that might be brought to bear on those issues.

Asset mapping has been in use as a planning tool for several years and has won many advocates as an alternative to traditional needs assessments. The notion of documenting or mapping community assets gained prominence when, in 1993, Northwestern University published *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, by John P. Kretzman and John McKnight. Based on their work in Chicago-area neighborhoods, they argued that communities are literally filled with assets, and yet only a few of these assets are used systematically for community building.

Assets, as defined by these two scholars, fall into three major categories:

- ♦ **Capacities or gifts of individuals, including such basic skills as typing or working on machinery, and extending into skills requiring more training or experience such as sales or employee supervision.**
- ♦ **Strengths of voluntary associations, such as civic clubs, parent-teacher groups and recreational clubs.**
- ♦ **Resources of formal institutions, including schools, churches, government offices and health care centers.**

To this list of assets, you might also add physical and monetary resources. Many of the community developers who have been working with the asset mapping approach suggest that communities, especially smaller or impoverished ones, can make more progress if they build from an asset base rather than focusing on their deficiencies. The idea here is that assets should be mapped, that is, listed and analyzed to determine how best to mobilize them for community betterment.

Of course, this mapping process can take the form of a graphic representation of the assets using symbols or designs to offer a picture of the community. An asset map is intended to show the presence of assets but not necessarily the actual location of each; rather, the term mapping refers to the action of identifying, analyzing and representing the assets.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### ***The Heartland Center's Approach***

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development has adapted the model of asset mapping to include an important first step: issue identification. While using asset mapping as part of a public engagement process for school reform, teams can use the identification of a local issue as a way to focus the asset mapping activities. Think of a team that identifies increasing vandalism as a significant local issue. As the team works on asset mapping, it would be identifying individual skills and expertise, local associations and institutions that *could be applied to this issue*.

***Identifying a significant issue targets the asset mapping and makes the collected information immediately useful for goal setting, strategy development and action planning.***

In other words, with an identified issue, the task of asset mapping becomes manageable and the results are put to use to mobilize the community to action.

### **Mapping Individual Assets**

---

One way to think about individual assets is to list the kinds of individual gifts that are useful for community building in general. These might include office skills, caring and healing skills or construction skills. Kretzman and McKnight's categories also include maintenance, transportation, equipment operation, food services, security, sales and supervision. To this list might be added other skills

areas, such as professional/technical, entertainment and communication, and leadership, as suggested in 1995 in *Community Resources and Community Opportunities*, a

**One way to think about individual assets is to list the kinds of individual gifts that are useful for community building in general.**

---

paper prepared for the Nebraska Rural Development Commission by Buzz Kalkowski. Beyond these categories of individual assets or gifts, McKnight and Kretzman also added communication skills and enterprising business development skills.

School-community leadership teams are encouraged to adapt the sample *Mapping Community Assets* list at the end of this chapter to deal with their target issue. The sample list suggests some categories and examples of individual assets but shouldn't be seen as all-inclusive. The team will have to add or delete items as needed, and the discussion of what skills and experiences might be useful for dealing with the local issue is itself a great way to think about the wonderful assets and advantages already in the community.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Voluntary Associations

---

Voluntary associations, such as service clubs and church groups, often provide the most important opportunity for community residents to try out leadership skills, learn how the community functions, and engage in local democracy on a small scale. Some researchers, notably Robert Putnam of Harvard University, have popularized this aspect of community under the topic of *social capital*, meaning the social or civic network of interactions that helps a community function as a whole, rather than just as a collection of individuals.

The community map of associations includes many categories such as interest groups, age-related groups, support groups, sports leagues, and so on. Even the smallest communities have several of these associations. They may be connected to a community institution, such as a church, or a national organization such as the Lions or the Business and Professional Women's clubs. More often these groups are strictly local, often with a long-standing tradition and focus of activity on the community's behalf.

School-community leadership teams are encouraged to list as many of these groups as possible, then to analyze them by mapping (listing) the key assets of each that might be used to deal with the local issue as identified. Some of these association assets might include:

- ♦ **membership (both the individuals and the mailing list)**
- ♦ **mission or purpose (might have an interest in the team's issue)**
- ♦ **recent programs or projects**
- ♦ **connections to national organizations**

These assets can be documented along with basic information about the organization such as offices, phone numbers and mailing information.

## Formal Institutions

---

A community's formal institutions constitute the location or ownership of a community's key physical and financial resources, in addition to a potential work force and equipment that might be used to respond to the issue. Except for private property, most of the "public" land, buildings and other tangible resources probably are owned by formal institutions. Examples of these are:

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ♦ <b>schools and colleges</b> | ♦ <b>police and fire stations</b> |
| ♦ <b>banks, credit unions</b> | ♦ <b>social service agencies</b>  |
| ♦ <b>hospitals, clinics</b>   | ♦ <b>government offices</b>       |
| ♦ <b>places of worship</b>    | ♦ <b>news media</b>               |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



As with associations, asset mapping includes the listing of the resources of these types of institutions that might be useful to the team as it deals with a local issue. Is a meeting place needed? Is there a need for printing or copying equipment? Would a "borrowed" executive help lead a project? Could a group of staff volunteers be recruited? Here are some other examples of institutional resources:

- ♦ facilities
- ♦ equipment
- ♦ staff volunteers
- ♦ staff expertise
- ♦ financial contributions

The school-community leadership team will have to consider the local institutions and, after analysis and discussion, identify the types of resources these institutions represent. This is done, once again, while keeping in mind the local issue and how these assets might be brought to bear on that issue.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



**Suggested Activities  
for  
Mapping Community and School Assets**

---

- ♦ Mapping Individual Assets
- ♦ Mapping the Assets of Citizen Associations
- ♦ Mapping the Assets of Local Institutions
- ♦ Starting a Community Skills Bank

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Mapping Individual Assets

Here's a sample list of individual skills that might be applied to a local issue. After you've identified such an issue, review the categories and skill examples. You might want to add or remove some as your team discusses what will help with the issue you've identified.

ISSUE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

| <i>Category</i>           | <i>Skill Example</i>                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Category</i>                | <i>Skill Example</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Healing and Caring</b> | caring for the sick<br>caring for the elderly<br>led a support group<br>hospice activities<br>health care/medical worker<br>foster parent<br>welcome wagon/<br>hospitality<br>other | <b>Information Services</b>    | receptionist<br>switchboard operation<br>bookkeeping<br>shorthand or speed-writing<br>word processing<br>desktop publishing<br>data entry<br>filing and organizing files<br>keyboarding: wpm _____<br>mass mailings<br>e-mail/ internet<br>other |
| <b>Supervision</b>        | writing reports<br>filling out forms<br>planning and assigning work for others<br>making a budget<br>keeping records<br>interviewing<br>other                                       | <b>Construction and Repair</b> | painting<br>building tear-down<br>wall papering<br>furniture repair<br>plumbing<br>concrete work<br>installing windows<br>carpentry<br>other                                                                                                     |
| <b>Food Services</b>      | catering<br>serving to more than 10<br>clearing/setting tables for more than 10<br>operating commercial equipment<br>bartending<br>baking<br>other                                  | <b>Landscaping</b>             | designing landscaping<br>planting and maintenance<br>gardening (vegetables)<br>farmer's market or stand<br>beautification projects                                                                                                               |

| <i>Category</i>                  | <i>Skill Example</i>                                                                                                                                                            | <i>Category</i>             | <i>Skill Example</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Entertainment</b>             | singing<br>dancing<br>directing others in productions<br>playing an instrument<br>writing skits and reviews<br>making scenery<br>making costumes                                | <b>Community/Leadership</b> | elected office<br>appointed office<br>membership in civic club<br>office in civic club<br>adult leader for youth club<br>survey or census interviews<br>fund raising events<br>community celebrations<br>community clean up projects<br>political campaigns<br>other |
| <b>Advertising and Promotion</b> | design brochures<br>plan marketing campaigns<br>write news releases<br>write public service spots<br>develop slogans and songs<br>develop special events, celebrations<br>other | <b>Enterprising</b>         | started a business<br>expanded an existing business<br>consulting services<br>invented a product or service<br>obtained a franchise<br>other                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Sales</b>                     | operate a cash register<br>sell products wholesale<br>sell products retail<br>door to door sales<br>telemarketing<br>home product parties<br>other                              | <b>Hobbies/Interests</b>    | skills you could teach/share<br>list special interests<br>other                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## **Mapping the Assets of Citizen Associations**

Here's a list of various types of citizen associations. Your team should try to list as many as possible from your community. Consider each association in terms of the strengths as described here and how these strengths might be applied to the issue your team has identified.

ISSUE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ***Type of Association***

|                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| artistic        | business                   |
| church-related  | elderly                    |
| ethnic          | health and fitness         |
| community media | political                  |
| service clubs   | social causes/philanthropy |
| study groups    | veterans                   |
| youth groups    | other                      |

### ***Possible Strengths***

membership:  
number, type, location of members?  
potential use of mailing lists?

### ***Age/Tradition/Reputation***

new or long-standing? known for a speciality?

### ***Mission***

single focus? target audience?

### ***Programs or Projects***

community service activities, special events, fund-raising  
expertise?

### ***Resources***

staff? offices or building?  
financial resources?

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Mapping the Assets of Local Institutions

The team can use this worksheet to identify local institutions and then consider what resources those institutions might represent. Remember to consider this information in terms of the issue your team has identified and how these institutional resources might be targeted for involvement.

ISSUE: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Local Institutions*

|                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| local government offices          | schools                    |
| parks                             | hospitals                  |
| clinics                           | community colleges         |
| private colleges                  | business schools           |
| national guard, military reserves | social service agencies    |
| churches                          | news media                 |
| law enforcement offices           | federal government offices |
| county agent's office             |                            |

### *Possible Resources*

facilities?  
buildings, meeting rooms, parking lots?

### *Materials*

printed materials, video and tape resources, web sites

### *Equipment*

tables, chairs, coffee makers, computers, vans

### *Purchasing Power*

discounts for mass orders

### *Employment Practices*

hire locals? any priorities allowed?

### *Training Opportunities*

in-house training as a chance for others in the community to learn skills

### *Financial Capacity*

contributions to local charities, projects, etc.

### *Advocacy and Influence*

special groups that might be targeted for involvement

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Creating a Community Skills Bank

---

Every community has an inventory of assets that are represented by the people, the informal groups and the formal organizations or institutions in the town. These three levels are made up of individuals, informal associations such as service clubs, and highly organized institutions such as churches and businesses.

A detailed list of community assets at all three levels would constitute a local resource directory, or "Community Skills Bank." The Community Skills Bank is one way to maintain an inventory of these assets, identifying local skills and resources that can be brought to bear on community problems.

For example, a retired teacher might be experienced in writing grant proposals. A service club might have a long history of success in local fund raising for community betterment. Perhaps the school has up-to-date computer equipment or software.

Any community asset can be applied to a community project, but assets easily overlooked if they are not listed in black and white and accessible to leaders of community projects.

*A Community Skills Bank is an internal directory representing assets waiting to be applied. It is a vital resource for people, groups, and organizations in the community.*

Here are some steps to consider in beginning the ongoing process of creating a Community Skills Bank. These steps will take two to four months to complete.

1. Recruit a working committee or task force with six to ten members. (A higher number will insure continuation even if some volunteers have to drop out.) Tap into a service club or two as cosponsors to provide for built-in accountability.
2. Conduct a first work session to review the approach to Asset Mapping described in these materials.

Before you adjourn, brainstorm a list of individuals, associations and institutions that are key to your community's future. Develop a list of individuals that has ten times the number of members of your working group. List 15 associations and ten institutions if you can.

3. At a second meeting, decide how to conduct an individual capacity inventory. Then decide how to gather and list the assets of the associations and institutions that you identified

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



previously. Information about each individual, group and organization could be collected by in-person or telephone interviews. Spread the work around so no one person has too big of a job.

4. Once initial information has been collected and organized, call a community-wide forum or town hall meeting to discuss the Community Skills Bank and to offer individuals and groups the chance to comment. Use a small group process at the meeting as a way to invite substantive contributions and additions.
5. Completed capacity inventory sheets (asset maps) will have to be compiled in some manner and duplicated so that all the information is together in one place. This is a good opportunity for high school classes to get involved in producing a document that can serve as a resource for the entire community. Use three-ring binders as a cover for your Community Skills Bank information so you can add to these inventories handily over time.
6. Make sure that any group or service club that's working on a project gets a copy of the binder. The local library should also have a copy. Most importantly, keep the information visible. Refer to it often so that it becomes a well-used resource as planning begins for any community project.
7. Plan for some publicity around the completion of this effort. If young residents are included in the Community Skills Bank, look for photo opportunities that show young people with the binder at the school library or in city hall.
8. Try to keep track of how the information is used. If a service club found a new set of helpers for a community cleanup day or a volunteer writer was recruited to help with a newspaper column, it means the Community Skills Bank is working.
9. Build in an annual get-together to update and add names and information to the collection.
10. Consider ways to say thanks to contributors and volunteers who get requests for help as a result of the Community Skills Bank.
11. Once your Community Skills Bank is underway, consider maintaining a similar three-ring binder as a Community Successes File, so you have a record of successful projects and other community "wins" that can be maintained over time. Use this file as a way to review past successes so you can learn from them to create more successes in the future.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Chapter 5: Developing Your Action Plan

---

### Overview

---

Many community volunteers find action planning the most exciting and motivating part of any school-community effort. This is the stage in the process of public engagement when the team will be able to recruit more helpers because of the concrete nature of the tasks at hand. The dimensions of short time frames and immediate action are very helpful in expanding public engagement. Individuals who might be frustrated by time spent on identifying issues and creating a vision statement will step to the forefront to get to work on a real time project.

### Setting Goals

---

However, the step of setting goals with a team is made easier by these previous activities. When key issues have been identified and serve to focus asset mapping, and when a vision statement has collected hopes for the future, then goals emerge from the combination of new information and opinion that's been gathered. Goal-setting should be relatively simple if the activity is nested in the background of vision, issues, and assets. Goals answer the question, *What should we do differently?*

In general, goals start the movement from vision to action. Goals should be:

- ♦ realistic and achievable
- ♦ clearly tied to the vision
- ♦ focused on the issues
- ♦ matched with the community assets

Suppose a team decided to target the issue of weak school-community relations. Here are some sample goals that would address that issue:

**Goal:** *Build relationships among key sectors of the community such as school, business, social services, and churches.*

**Goal:** *Increase the sense of ownership of the schools on the part of community residents.*

**Goal:** *Connect the school and the local economy.*

Consideration of each of these examples would require the team to examine the assets that had been identified. In this way, individual

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



experiences and expertise, the strengths of local associations and the resources of nearby institutions could be brought to bear on the issue.

### **Developing Strategies**

---

The next step is to develop strategies based on goals. Strategies answer the question, *How do we get it done?* Sometimes, those volunteers who arrive at a Town Hall meeting or public engagement opportunity will have already arrived at this point in their own thinking.

These people will have focused on an issue that's important to them and decided on a specific action or response and moved immediately to the strategy they believe should be employed. It's common for some expressions of frustration to be

**Taking the time to identify issues as a group, create a shared vision, and explore local assets takes time, and it also improves the final results.**

---

evident when the team takes the community through a systematic process and arrives at the strategy development stage after lots of work has been done setting the stage.

While it's understandable that an individual can have a strong sense of urgency about an issue and a personally held idea about how to handle an issue, it's vital that a team take the time to step back from this position. Taking the time to identify issues *as a group*, create a shared vision and explore local assets takes time but it also improves the final results. The time spent on these steps also brings more community residents to the table, allows for expanded participation and keeps a project from being identified solely with one individual or group.

The very best strategies for action include some consideration of these characteristics:

- ♦ significant impact
- ♦ small or reasonable cost
- ♦ short time for completion
- ♦ high visibility
- ♦ uses the assets that have been identified in the school and community

Not every strategy will match these characteristics perfectly, but these make an excellent filter for deciding which strategies to select or which ones to start working on first.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Building on the examples of goals already discussed, here are some examples of strategies that a team might develop.

**Goal:** Build relationships among key sectors of the community such as school, business, social services, churches.

**Strategy:** Recruit a task force of representatives from the various sectors to exchange information with the school on issues of mutual concern.

Note: Useful assets might include an AARP volunteer with experience in meeting facilitation, a school class on current issues that could prepare some background papers for discussion, and the American Legion, which, might offer meeting space.

**Strategy:** Create a school intern program that will bring students into the workplaces of community sectors.

Note: Useful assets might include school staff with experience in the management of an intern program, the local Chamber whose membership could sponsor internships with businesses, and a nearby community college that could offer a beginning class on business and the local economy for interns and their sponsors.

**Strategy:** Create a mentoring program that will bring adults from the community sectors into the schools.

Note: Useful assets might include the list of previous volunteers from lower grades that could be recruited for high school mentors, a service club like BPW or the Lions that could target its membership for mentors, and a state chapter of a national organization such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters that could offer support and training for mentors.

### **Defining a Project or Activity**

Obviously, a project or an activity must flow logically from a goal and one of the strategies and make use of identified assets (individual, association or institutional). Generally, the more your project will produce a visible result, the more effective your school-community leadership team will be. That's especially true with short-term projects, since part of the expected outcomes of public engagement in the school reform effort is to increase the community's support of locally driven efforts to build and strengthen both the school and the community.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Here's another example. Suppose this was the vision statement that the team developed:

**Vision:** In the future, our community and school will be free of the negative impacts of any type of vandalism and serve as a source of pride for students, families and all residents.

And the team, along with a representative group of community residents, identified several issues and selected this one to target.

**Issue:** Increased vandalism incidents in the community

A goal that might emerge from this combination would be:

**Goal:** Strengthen school and community identity and pride

**Strategy:** Create several events that celebrate the school and community's identity and heritage

**Assets:** Individuals with information about the community's past as a source of ideas for heritage events, individuals with expertise in desktop publishing, newsletter writing, brochure and poster development, event planning, service clubs or associations with membership lists for mailings, a tradition of sponsoring public events, and institutions such as the historical society or department of tourism that might have staff, funds or supporting materials to offer.

At this point, the team could use brainstorming to list activities that would get this strategy into action. They might decide to:

- ♦ research and identify three heritage ideas for public events
- ♦ seek outside funding to help with these events
- ♦ develop a publicity campaign to increase awareness of community identity

### **Implementation Steps**

---

This phase is critical to the success of the public engagement process because if, in fact, individuals take on responsibility to complete some task by an agreed upon time, then the vision will become action and progress will be made.

Several considerations can make this part of the process more successful. First, *break tasks into small, manageable assignments*. Any assignment will seem more doable if divided into smaller parts. Second, *assign pairs to work together on tasks*. By teaming volunteers to work on tasks, accountability is built into the pair, and they can rely on one another for support and for motivation. Third, *make sure that the*

### **Better Schools through Public Engagement**



*deadline is reasonable and public.* Allow enough time for phone calls to be made, research to be finished, letters to be written. When the deadline is known to everyone, a degree of urgency will be part of the reason to finish the job. Fourth, *plan a report back to the entire team on progress.* Use a poster session or verbal reports, but make sure that everyone gets a chance to report on her/his results.

Here's the start of an Action Plan that builds on previous examples:

**Strategy:** Create several events that build on the community's heritage and identity.

| Who           | What                             | When      |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Sandy & Bill  | Interview newspaper editor       | by Nov 30 |
|               | Visit historical society         | by Nov 30 |
| Andrew & Fred | Contact state tourism for ideas  | by Dec 5  |
| Rene & Carol  | Interview six longtime residents | by Dec 5  |

School-community leadership teams can use the following *Action Planning Worksheet* to organize activities and check off task as they are completed.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Action Planning Worksheet

Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

| Actions<br>or<br>Tasks | Person(s)<br>Responsible | Completion Date |        |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------|
|                        |                          | Expected        | Actual |
| 1.                     |                          |                 |        |
| 2.                     |                          |                 |        |
| 3.                     |                          |                 |        |
| 4.                     |                          |                 |        |
| 5.                     |                          |                 |        |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



**Suggested Activities  
for  
Developing Your Action Plan**

---

- ♦ Goal-Setting with a Group
- ♦ A Town Hall Meeting Sampler
- ♦ Both Sides of the Trend: A Discussion Guide

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Goal-Setting With A Group

---

**Goal:** To help group members generate information that may be used in setting shared goals and planning program activities.

**Time Required:** 2 to 4 hours

**Materials:** Pencils, 3 x 5 cards, flip chart, tape and markers

### Directions

1. Leader introduces the activity by discussing the need for shared goals. Goals can be defined as broad, general statements of the end we want to achieve. Goals are especially helpful when evaluating work and enable the group to "keep on target" as they work.
2. Leader asks each group member to use a 3 x 5 card and answer the following question:

*What kind of activities would you like to see our group doing five years from now?*

Group members are encouraged to be creative and make a "wish-list." Allow 5 to 15 minutes for this work.

3. Leaders ask individuals to share their responses in trios and come to agreement on a list that represents their ideals. Flip chart sheets and markers are provided. Allow 10 to 20 minutes for this work and ask each trio (small group) to display their list.
4. When the lists are displayed, the leader asks someone from each group to report to the large group about their list. Each small group reports briefly. Allow 5 to 10 minutes for each small group report.
5. Leader then asks group to suggest categories that emerge from the lists. A colored marker can be used to circle similar items on all the lists in order to emphasize the similarity. Allow 15 to 30 minutes, depending upon the number of lists.
6. Leader then asks the group to suggest a possible goal statement based on the category. A brainstorming session can also be useful at this point.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **A Town Hall Meeting Sampler**

---

One of the most effective ways to encourage thinking about and planning for the future within a community is to conduct a community forum or town hall meeting. This sampler includes an outline for forming a steering committee, and for planning, organizing and conducting a town hall meeting. Sample agendas for both steering committee meetings and the town hall meeting itself are included.

Using some tried-and-true methods, this sampler is a summary of reminders that will help to ensure success. Some of the important points include:

1. It is very important to organize a representative group or steering committee that will take on the varied tasks involved in promoting and conducting a successful town hall meeting.
2. Using a task list to make sure you've thought of everything can help to avoid panic at the last minute.
3. People are more likely to stick with task assignments if their roles and duties are very clear.
4. Any ideas your group can develop that will make the meeting comfortable, useful, and well-paced will help to make the town hall event different from do-nothing meetings.

The town hall event described in the sampler is designed to serve as the first work session in a community effort to plan for the future. An initial community work session will result in a solid basis of shared understanding about the future and a good start at analyzing the impacts on the community. It also serves as a first step in organizing a core group of leaders from which to draw for further planning and development activities.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### ***Some Guidelines for Conducting a Town Hall Meeting***

The following guidelines are meant to suggest approaches for organizing a town hall meeting. The underlying assumptions of these guidelines are:

1. Each community is unique, so a technique or method for working with a group or promoting a meeting must be adapted by those people who understand the community.
2. Community members respond to the opportunity to reflect on and discuss change and its impacts on their lives.
3. Such reflection and discussion is vital to good decision-making.

### ***Organizing and Promoting a Town Hall Meeting***

#### ***Steering Committee***

The importance of a steering committee to the success of any community-wide effort cannot be underestimated. Whether the group is called a planning or work group, a task force, or a steering committee, it remains as the source of ideas, action and credibility for the project.

Some questions that should be asked before members are selected might include:

1. What do you want the role of the group to be? Will they be asked to lend their name and credibility to the project or, going beyond sponsorship, will they be asked to perform tasks such as doing mailings, writing press releases, making speeches?
2. Based on the role or task that is required, who is the best person to include in the group?
3. What is the best strategy to use to interest potential members in the group? Is there an individual who is best suited to making particular invitations?
4. How can the makeup of this group best reflect the entire community? Are all aspects of the town represented? When you look at your list of group members, who's not here?

#### ***Sample Meeting Agenda***

- ♦ Introductions (just to make sure everyone is acquainted).
- ♦ Share agenda (so that everyone knows what to expect in the next hour).
- ♦ Explain the idea of a town hall meeting and provide information on the project or activity.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



- ♦ Ask if anyone else should be part of the steering committee (*Who's not here?*)
- ♦ Share a sample plan for the town hall meeting (time, place, purpose, agenda).
- ♦ Share a task list and choose responsibilities (who, what, when).
- ♦ Set a date for the next meeting.

### ***Follow-up***

After members of the group have heard ideas and enthusiasm about a town hall meeting, they will most likely agree to help with various tasks. However, it's vital that someone takes the lead in maintaining continuous contact with the group. It's usually the people who are already very busy who choose to get involved in community projects, so reminder telephone calls, postcards and informal visits can be very helpful in keeping a group on task and meeting their deadlines.

### ***Sample Task List for Organizing a Town Hall Meeting***

**Facilities:** Reserving place and date

**Promotion:**

- ♦ Special invitations to people in recognized leadership positions such as officers of service clubs, church organizations, Chamber of Commerce, elected and appointed officials, ministers.
- ♦ Press release or special notice for newspapers, radio stations and organizational newsletters that your community members might receive.
- ♦ Notices, posters, flyers in well-traveled places in the community.
- ♦ Use of "telephone trees" within service clubs and other organizations to invite community members.
- ♦ Sending an invitation to families from the school, notice in the school bulletin or a flyer sent home with students.
- ♦ Including an invitation with a monthly utility bill.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### ***Conducting the Town Hall Meeting***

Actually conducting a town hall meeting isn't difficult if you have an active steering committee or group that will divide the tasks into manageable parts. Several roles are particularly important and should be considered carefully by the group.

**Registration Table:** Sign in and pick up materials.

**Greeters:** Host/hostess to greet people at the door, thank them for coming and ask them to sign in at the registration table.

**Convener:** An individual who will be recognized by most members of the community and who will lend credibility to the meeting, provide the official welcome and introduce the first activity, and close the meeting at the end of the evening.

**Activity Leader:** An individual who has become familiar with the agenda and can direct participants to form smaller groups, then provide a summary of the activity at the end of the meeting.

**Discussion Leaders:** Individuals who can help groups of seven to ten community members work through a discussion activity and direct participants to small group sessions.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## ***Sample Agenda***

---

The following agenda is provided as a sample. It is very flexible and can be adapted to the specific needs in each community.

**6:30 p.m. Registration and Coffee**

Participants get name tag, agenda and sample issues sheet

**7:00 p.m. Share Agenda**

Purpose of the meeting

**7:10 p.m. Review Sample Issues**

Distribute questions for public deliberation (as determined by the steering committee)

**7:15 p.m. Discussion Activity**

1. break into small groups
2. facilitators lead discussion and record ideas: each table creates a list of the top three issues
3. each table reports, and a master list is created
4. each participant gets five self-adhesive dots and "votes" for the top issues

**8:15 p.m. Break and Refreshments** while participants visit and the votes (dots) are tabulated

**8:30 p.m. Report on Ranking of Issues**

Table groups discuss the top issue and consider the town's strengths and weaknesses related to that issue

**9:00 p.m. Tables Report Their Comments**

**9:30 p.m. Closing and Evaluation**

Participants fill out evaluation sheet:

*What did you like about tonight's meeting?*

*What would you change?*

**9:45 p.m. Steering Committee Meets to Read Evaluation Forms and Discuss Next Steps**

*What would you have changed about this meeting?*

*What specific actions do you see as possible for you or your community?*

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### Meeting/Activity Sample Evaluation Form

1. What did you like best about this activity?
  
  
  
  
  
2. What did you like the least?
  
  
  
  
  
3. The most important thing I learned was...
  
  
  
  
  
4. The way this activity was designed and conducted made me feel...
  
  
  
  
  
5. How would you rate this activity in achieving its goals?

Goal I: \_\_\_\_\_

|               |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                  |
| Not<br>At All |   |   |   | Very<br>Successful |

Goal II: \_\_\_\_\_

|               |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| 1             | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5                  |
| Not<br>At All |   |   |   | Very<br>Successful |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Both Sides of the Trend: A Discussion Guide**

---

This exercise is designed to help groups begin to focus on those trends that are most significant to the future of their community and to identify the threats and opportunities represented by those trends.

The basic design of this activity is a structured discussion in which group members decide on a trend that they wish to discuss and then analyze the impacts of that trend in terms of the threats and opportunities it will bring.

For example, an obvious trend that small towns must deal with is the increasing age of their population. This change in the demographic profile of their citizens may be a threat in some ways (having tremendous impacts on housing and health care needs) but in other ways might prove to be an opportunity (in areas of retired volunteers or business opportunities in services to the elderly).

The guide is based on trends identified during a statewide strategic leadership project and outlines this activity step-by-step, from selecting a recorder to keep track of the discussion, to brainstorming guidelines, to samples of group discussion questions.

The time required for this activity will vary depending on the amount of time allowed for discussion. However, you should plan on one to one and one-half hours to complete this discussion activity.

### ***Goals:***

1. To structure the discussion of probable trends on the positive and negative impacts of each trend.
2. To help keep the discussion focused on a particular topic.
3. To organize the information and ideas that come from the discussion.

Please read the directions as your group proceeds through the discussion:

1. As a group, select a recorder who will keep track of the discussion on the newsprint provided.
2. As an individual, take a look at the following list of trends and pick one that seems most significant to you.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



### *Trends*

- ♦ Likely consolidation of government and business services into larger towns.
  - ♦ Continuing debate over moral/ethical issues in health care.
  - ♦ New revenue sources necessary to maintain quality education at all levels.
  - ♦ The number of banks operating in the state will continue to decrease.
  - ♦ Great expansion of telecommunications and information available by direct access.
  - ♦ Fewer farms, more regulation of all natural resources and expanded products and processing in agriculture.
  - ♦ More manufacturing jobs.
  - ♦ Increased services to the elderly.
3. In turn, each member should tell the group which trend he or she picked as most significant. (*You might want to record the other group members' choices here.*)
  4. As a group, select a trend to discuss in depth.  
*The recorder should list this choice on newsprint.*
  5. Your task now is to create a list of the threats represented by this trend and the opportunities it will bring.

*Trend:* \_\_\_\_\_

| <i>Threats</i> | <i>Opportunities</i> |
|----------------|----------------------|
|                |                      |

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



6. Now, as a group, create a list that will include all the ideas that each individual has developed. Your recorder should list these ideas on the newsprint provided.

Make sure that everyone's ideas are included.

About 20 minutes has been planned for this part of the activity.

7. When your group has finished creating a list of the threats and opportunities that will result from a probable trend, you might want to take some time to discuss some of the ideas.
- ♦ Can any of the threats be minimized?
  - ♦ Can any of the opportunities be maximized?
  - ♦ How can communities prepare for the threats of the future trend you discussed?
  - ♦ How can communities make the most of the opportunities created by this trend?
8. Listen for directions for sharing your work with the total group.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Chapter 6: Monitoring Results

---

### About Learning Teams

---

Learning teams are part of the school-community group that has accepted the challenge of tracking progress in the process of public engagement in school reform. What the learning team can do is to make sure that the community is learning as much as it can about the progress that is being made, so that lessons from both successes and failures may be captured and saved.

It's important to note that this basic premise is somewhat different than a typical evaluation approach. Rather than waiting to assess success at the end of a project, a learning team approach focuses on continuous feedback. The emphasis is on learning from our experiences, rather than evaluating successes and failures.

Typically, learning teams are comprised of volunteers, although staff members of organizations cooperating in the public engagement process might also be involved. (The learning team role may be assumed directly by the entire school-community leadership team, but it's often wise to name a separate group so that the work is shared. This means that the learning team is, essentially, a subgroup of the leadership team.)

Members of the learning team agree to take on several tasks:

- ♦ **Becoming knowledgeable about the public engagement process itself and any intended outcomes that have been articulated by the school-community leadership team, by the learning team or by some process that identifies other hoped-for results.**
- ♦ **Participating in establishing means to measure those outcomes using reasonable and realistic processes of measurement that will communicate results easily and simply.**
- ♦ **Following through with action as the key people who track down the information necessary to support a conclusion about the project's progress.**
- ♦ **Communicating that information to the parties who have a need to know and learn.**

Learning teams should seek to identify ways to measure progress, not just describe it. That is, the information they collect will be most useful if it is *data-oriented*, rather than only observations or opinions.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



This means that learning team members should accept responsibility to be creative about how progress might be traced, seeking new ways that might go beyond traditional signs of success.

### **The Continuous Learning Cycle**

---

Learning teams are seen as important players in what might be called a *cycle of continuous learning*. This is a cycle of review that attempts to expand what is known on a continuous basis so that improvements might be made as the activity or project is proceeding.

Too often, in traditional evaluation activities, progress is not really measured until after the fact. At the point when the project is over, the value of the evaluative information is to guide future projects or to be added to the body of knowledge that might be studied.

**Continuous review expands what is known so that improvements might be made as the activity or project is proceeding.**

---

The learning team approach is different in that it not only assumes that citizens can act as evaluators but also that the

**purpose is to provide feedback to the process while it is ongoing.** In this respect, the learning team approach borrows from the concept of *Continuous Quality Improvement (TQI)* that has enjoyed popularity in the corporate world.

The cycle of feedback and improvement can also be called, "Action, Reflection, Action" to underscore the notion that:

- **Action** is taken (the public engagement effort begins).
- An opportunity for **Reflection** is provided (consideration by the learning team and the leadership team).
- Some type of revised **Action** is taken (based on the information collected to guide reflection by the learning team).

The notion is that a process such as public engagement for school reform will benefit from a continuous monitoring of progress and learning.

What will the work of the learning team look like? For example, one intended outcome of the public engagement process might be improved relations among the school and various businesses in town. The learning team develops some indicators of progress or signs of success, and then goes about the work of gathering the relevant information. The indicators of success and the measures may be simple, but watching progress over time will result in an awareness that something has really changed because of the leadership team's work.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



In this example, the learning team might assign members to monitor whether more teachers become active in the local Chamber of Commerce (measured in a number collected from the Chamber's staff), or whether a target number of businesses offer rewards for academic or sports achievements (measured in numbers collected from school staff).

After some time, the learning team might also report progress to the community through a newspaper article or a call-in radio program. And, if insufficient progress is made, then some revision to the efforts of the school-community leadership team might be in order.

### **Learning Team Meetings**

---

Because the learning team can operate as a subcommittee of the school-community leadership team, work sessions within the group may be very different from what members have experienced while planning or implementing a project in the past.

In the learning team, each member is responsible for attending to both the task assignments and the equal participation of all members in the group.

This demands attention from all members and a commitment to use work session time productively, to deal promptly and directly with conflict and to share credit as well as leadership.

One of the easiest ways to accomplish all this is to establish some patterns for learning team work sessions. By using a simple formula of standard agenda topics and questions for discussion, the group can create an atmosphere where the best of work, empowerment and learning can occur.

Of course, this doesn't mean that each work session will be exactly the same. New agenda items will occur, topics will develop and creative approaches will be tried out. Still a basic structure can go a long way towards making the most of time spent in work sessions.

**...the group can create an atmosphere where the best of work, empowerment, and learning can occur.**

---

### **Some Guidelines For Work Sessions**

---

As with any group working together, every agenda should address the need for members to feel welcome and comfortable. This means that introductions might be necessary if visitors are present, or an update offered to a member who's been absent.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Some groups regularly begin the meeting with some "check in" time to help the group come to focus on working together. Comfort also means time, place and possibly refreshments (always a welcome way to keep things informal).

Most members will also want to know what to expect during the work session regarding topics, discussion, actions and the ending time. Getting the agenda out ahead of time will help these members anticipate the meeting and increase their comfort level.

Another item that should be on every agenda is a review of the time lines, deadlines, due dates, and so on. This builds into the learning team work session a sense of accountability for assignments. In fact, some learning teams will simply post a time line on flip chart sheets and refer to it at the beginning of each work session.

### **Discussion Questions for Learning Teams**

---

Some discussion questions can be standard and used over and over again at different stages of the public engagement process. For example, asking...

*Is this the best way to accomplish this task?*

will create a discussion on improvement and provide for continuous learning.

And asking...

*What would we do differently if we had to repeat this task?*

is a way to collect experiences and learn from them.

*Who else should be involved?*

is a question that will inform a discussion of representation.

*What skills do we need?*

will result in a description of the type of volunteers to be recruited.

Regarding the identification or impacts or results, the group can use a series of questions to review the outcomes established for public engagement, check on the usefulness of the indicators or signs of success that have been set and review their progress in gathering information for measuring change.

By asking, "Is this really what we want to know?" about a set of outcomes, indicators and measures, you can make sure that the information to be gathered is practical and will, in fact, show that the process resulted in some changes over time.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



Lastly, the learning team might want to discuss how to keep the public engagement process visible to the community and ask, "Who needs to know about this?" and "What should we tell them?"

A good summary question for team reflection is, "What are we learning about ourselves and our community?"

Many other useful questions can be created by the team in a brainstorming session during any of the team's meetings.

### **Learning Teams as Participatory Evaluation**

---

Learning teams focused on monitoring progress of public engagement in school reform represent the application of an evaluation technique called participatory evaluation. The use of participatory evaluation is an increasing trend in both international and U.S. community development.

While the use of an outside or external evaluator represents a traditional and often useful approach to evaluation, many community projects are now guided by an internal, on-site evaluation led by participants themselves

This type of evaluation by participants has many advantages. It offers community residents an opportunity to learn and practice new skills, thereby increasing the capacity of the community to manage similar projects in the future.

Participatory evaluation also represents a strategy to empower local people to guide and alter a project based on information that they themselves gather. This is a type of evaluation that **forms** the local effort as it evolves rather than an evaluation that **sums-up** the effort after it is finished.

In participatory evaluation, control of the process resides locally, as does the responsibility to act on information that indicates a need to adjust or revise a project plan.

Many resources are available concerning participatory evaluation and learning teams. One excellent resource is the Community Partnership Center at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (423-974-9030). A search of the Kellogg Collection of Rural Development Resources ([www.unl.edu/kellogg/index.html](http://www.unl.edu/kellogg/index.html)) will offer other materials on learning teams and participatory evaluation.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Suggested Activities for Monitoring Results**

---

- ♦ Sample Work Session Agenda
- ♦ Questions for Self Assessment
- ♦ Rotating the Conveners of Meetings

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## **Sample Work Session Agenda**

---

A typical learning team work session agenda might look like this.

### ***HOMETOWN Learning Team***

*January 15, 2000*

**Convener**     **Diane Green**

**Start Time**     **Greetings and Personal Updates**

Review of Assignments

Report on Citizen Task Force

- ♦ attendance  
(number in each)
- ♦ representation  
(geographic, age, gender, and ethnicity)

#### **Report on Town Hall Follow-up**

- ♦ Newspaper coverage  
(number of stories)
- ♦ Letters to the editors  
(number of submissions)
- ♦ Student newspaper  
(number of students working on stories)

**Discussion:** Speakers Bureau with Service Clubs  
"Is this the BEST way to organize this effort?"

**Date for next work session,** select a discussion  
leader

**End Time**     **Adjourn**

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Questions for Self-Assessment

---

With members of your learning team or any work group or task force, ask each member first to answer the following five questions on their own. Then ask each person, in turn, to share answers to Question No. 1. Pause for group discussion before moving on to Question No. 2. Share answers to each question and follow in order until all questions have been discussed.

- 1. What are we learning about ourselves and our communities?*
  
- 2. What successes are we having?*
  
- 3. What changes are we making?*
  
- 4. In what ways might we apply what we are learning in other contexts?*
  
- 5. What other questions should we be asking ourselves?*

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**



## Rotating the Conveners of Meetings

For a learning team, the technique of rotating the duty of convening each meeting can offer a great, informal way to insure involvement, share responsibility and build in the unique perspective of each member. Simply put, this means that each member takes a turn as the leader for a given work session or meeting.

As with most group process techniques, this is not a complicated maneuver; but it does require the agreement of all to share the duty and a systematic method to actually use the technique on a regular basis.

Here are some suggestions on how to put the idea into action:

1. As a group, discuss the technique and the use of the word *convener*. It's helpful to list the duties of a convener (as opposed to, say, a discussion leader, or club president). These duties might include greeting members, beginning the meeting, making sure the agenda is covered, watching the time and making sure all voices are heard. Your group may add additional duties.
2. Establish a pattern that the next meeting's agenda is built in as the last item of the current meeting. In this way, the next convener has a plan and can spend some time preparing and thinking ahead about the next meeting.
3. Arrange a 30-minute "prep time" for the next two conveners to get together and plan the upcoming meeting. Now, the future is planned and both upcoming conveners have some support from one another.
4. As a group, agree to offer some feedback to each and every convener after the meeting. This can be an informal remark (*The way you encouraged everyone to speak was helpful*), a written note before leaving, or whatever makes the group comfortable. What's important about this is the feedback to the individual and the pattern of encouraging, offering suggestions for improvement and interaction that are the hallmarks of a learning team.

**Better Schools  
through  
Public Engagement**

